



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Supporting the Survivors: His Struggle, My Struggle, Our Struggle **Part 2 of 3 Part Series**

HAYDEN, ID – The word survivor might conjure up images of a person who has triumphantly beat their battle with cancer or miraculously walked away from a plane crash. For members of the Survivor Support Group in north Idaho, the word takes on another meaning. The group supports those who have lost a loved one to suicide. They are the ones left to figure out how to survive after losing someone in a way that many are uncomfortable speaking about.

One woman, Karen Petit, wants to change that.

“I lost my brother 16 years ago and he is the last person you would have ever expected to die by suicide,” said Petit, founder of the Survivor Support Group. “He led a happy life, when he was gone it completely shattered my family and his wife’s family.”

Petit’s brother, Donnie, began having trouble sleeping about six weeks prior to his death. He worked with his physician who diagnosed Donnie with depression. Donnie was prescribed an anti-depressant and an appointment with a mental health professional was made. Donnie disappeared the day of his appointment with the mental health provider. He died by suicide.

“The stigma of mental illness prevented my brother from reaching out to family and friends,” Petit said. “My sister-in-law had wanted to share what was happening with him with family, but Donnie was embarrassed and asked her to keep it between them.”

A small group of community members attend the support group each month to share their stories of survival. Similar to Petit, they are left wondering what if their loved ones had felt comfortable speaking about their struggle. Often, they confide in each other on what helps and what doesn’t in coping with their loss. Karen began the group in 2007 and has some members that have been attending for eight and ten years.

“Some come for a few meetings and some just for one,” said Petit. “Many come for a long time and then will tell me they don’t feel like they need the group anymore, but they still want to come to be there for others.”

Petit first became involved in suicide prevention groups as a member of the Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN). After she was unable to find a support group for survivors like her in our area, she decided to start her own.

“For a long time, I needed to find an answer,” said Petit. “I realized I may never know the answer and I have to accept that. I still have days where I start to question everything, but I’m a survivor.”

The Survivor Support Group meets the first Wednesday of every month at 7:00pm. If you would like to attend, contact Karen Petit.

SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUP

1st Wednesday of every month

Karen Petit: kcpetit@hotmail.com

Everyone can help prevent suicide. One way that PHD suggests people can become more aware is to take a QPR class. QPR, Question, Persuade, Refer, is the CPR of mental health. People who take the class are taught techniques to recognize if someone may be contemplating suicide. The class teaches how someone could approach someone who may be thinking of hurting themselves, what questions to ask, how to persuade them to seek help and then to refer them to a professional.

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicide, there is help available. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support. 1-800-273-8255. The North Idaho Crisis Center is open 24/7/365 and provides care to men and women at no cost. They can be reached at 208-625-4884 and they accept walk-ins.

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Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.